

VZCZCXRO8790  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHIHL #0122/01 2050427  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 240427Z JUL 06  
FM REO HILLAH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0681  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0668  
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 0735

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000122

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 7/24/2016  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON NAJAF CAR BOMBINGS

HILLAH 00000122 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Alfred Fonteneau, Regional Coordinator, REO Al Hillah, US Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[11](#). (C) Summary. According to local contacts, police believe that three of an original seven VBIEDs (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices) are still roaming Najaf streets. However, two suspects have been arrested for the Friday, July 6 (VBIED) which exploded between two buses carrying tourists from Iran, killing seventeen. One of the suspects, Abu Nadj, is a Kufa local and possible Al-Sadr insider. Police believe his involvement in the July 6 and possibly the July 18 bombing would explain how the VBIEDs penetrated check points and exploded close to Muqtada al-Sadr's compound. On July 5, provincial security officials had received intelligence relating to a VBIED the evening prior and tightened security leading into the city of Najaf. The security posture, however, was lowered at 0400, 3 hours before the attack. As a result, Najaf security has been tightened. Lines of up to 250 cars have formed on major roads leading into Najaf as police instituted a curfew and road blocks that effectively prevent civilian cars from driving within the city. End summary.

[12](#). (C) In the Kufa quarter of the city of Najaf on July 6, a VBIED exploded, killing 17 Iranian tourists. The blast occurred at a location between the local IP station and the Kufa mosque. The injured were taken to Al Hakim hospital and "hasty" IP checkpoints were raised throughout the city. It is not known whether the attack was meant to kill the Iranian tourists, though it is widely known that groups such as the one attacked are frequently arriving in the area. This marks the second VBIED attack in Kufa in the last four months. The previous attack occurred April 6, in the vicinity of the Imam Ali Shrine, one of Shia's most holy sites.

[13](#). (C) The July 6 blast was followed by an even more lethal attack on Tuesday, July 18. A KIA mini-bus picked up ten day laborers, drove a few feet, and detonated, killing 59 and wounding 132. The blast location was a few hundred meters from the Kufa Shrine. According to local contacts, Najaf security officials believe the two blasts are part of a group of seven VBIEDs brought into the city (note: the press has reported fifteen VBIEDs total, but police contacts put the total at seven). Another vehicle was reportedly seized, and an explosion against a CF convoy, originally attributed to an IED, may have been one of the seven VBIEDs. Reportedly, three of the vehicles are still at large within Najaf. Najaf perimeter security remains tight with a curfew from 1800 until 0400. Lines of up to 250 cars are common at checkpoints leading into the city and many drivers are giving up, walking through the check points, and looking for taxis on the far side.

¶4. (C) The local provincial government prides itself on its ability to fend off the violence seen in other provinces around Iraq. Following the July 6 explosion, they were left reviewing their security standards and to some extent, attempting to lay blame for the security lapse. The Governor, Assad Al Taei and the Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Abtan both raised the idea that Ministry of Defense (MOD) intelligence had failed to sufficiently collect information prior to the attack. In fact, at 1900 the evening of July 5, MOD had passed down intelligence to provincial officials warning that a vehicle, modified with explosives was en route to Najaf. The vehicle was reported to have Baghdad license plates. The security posture in Najaf was raised to the highest alert. However, at 0400 the following morning, the alert was lifted. It is not yet known why the alert was lifted or by whom, but it is likely as simple as local officials attempting to avoid traffic problems before morning "rush hour".

¶5. (C) Theories quickly came to the fore. One of the most prominent involved Mahmud Al Sarkhi. He is a former student of Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq Al Sadr, the father of Muqtada Al Sadr. The elder Sadr dismissed Al Sarkhi from his studies, for unknown reasons. Al Sarkhi returned to Iraq from exile after the fall of the former regime and allied himself with Muqtada Al Sadr. Recently he has begun to lure disenchanted Mahdi Militia members to a splinter group that repudiates Muqtada Al Sadr's foray into legitimate politics. His group is the "Army of the Guardians" and has recently raised its activity level in South Central Iraq. As of July 20, police had arrested two suspects. One, Abu Naji, is a Kufa resident and alleged Mahdi Militia member, but it is unknown whether he has connections to Al Sarkhi or perhaps even to Al Qaeda.

¶6. (C) Sabah Al Amiri, leader of Shaheed Allah (Allah's Martyrs) a Sadrist organization, said that activities such as this attack are conducted by released prisoners. He blames Coalition Forces (CF) for allowing Baathists, who were rightly arrested by Iraqi security forces, to be released from prison. This practice is

HILLAH 00000122 002.2 OF 002

done he said, so "the invasion forces can justify their continued presence in Iraq". "This act", he opined, "will only serve to make Kufa the capitol of the Islamic world". Al Amiri's view was echoed by SCIRI representatives. Both the deputy governor and Jafer Al Hakim of SCIRI party said that they were satisfied with the performance of security forces, but that Baathists were responsible for the attack. "Sunni scholars", noted Al Hakim, "must condemn the attack in order to preserve harmony in Iraq". COMMENT: Ex-Baathists are frequently found among the Mahdi Militia ranks and it is possible that Naji has a Baathist background. END COMMENT

¶7. (C) Comment. Attacks such as these VBIEDs had been rare in Najaf. The fact that they have occurred in Kufa, a Sadr stronghold, is likely more than a coincidence. Though there is little evidence that the two recent VBIED attacks are related, they clearly target the throngs of religious pilgrims who view the area as holy. It is also worth noting that Muqtada Al Sadr considers Kufa his fortress and will likely be embarrassed by the ability of anyone to infiltrate and execute these acts of violence. There are growing numbers of violent young men who are being drawn to leaders who provide an opportunity to strike at coalition forces. Sadr's political activities appear to be diluting the cult of personality from which he has benefited since the fall of Saddam Hussein. End Comment  
FONTENEAU